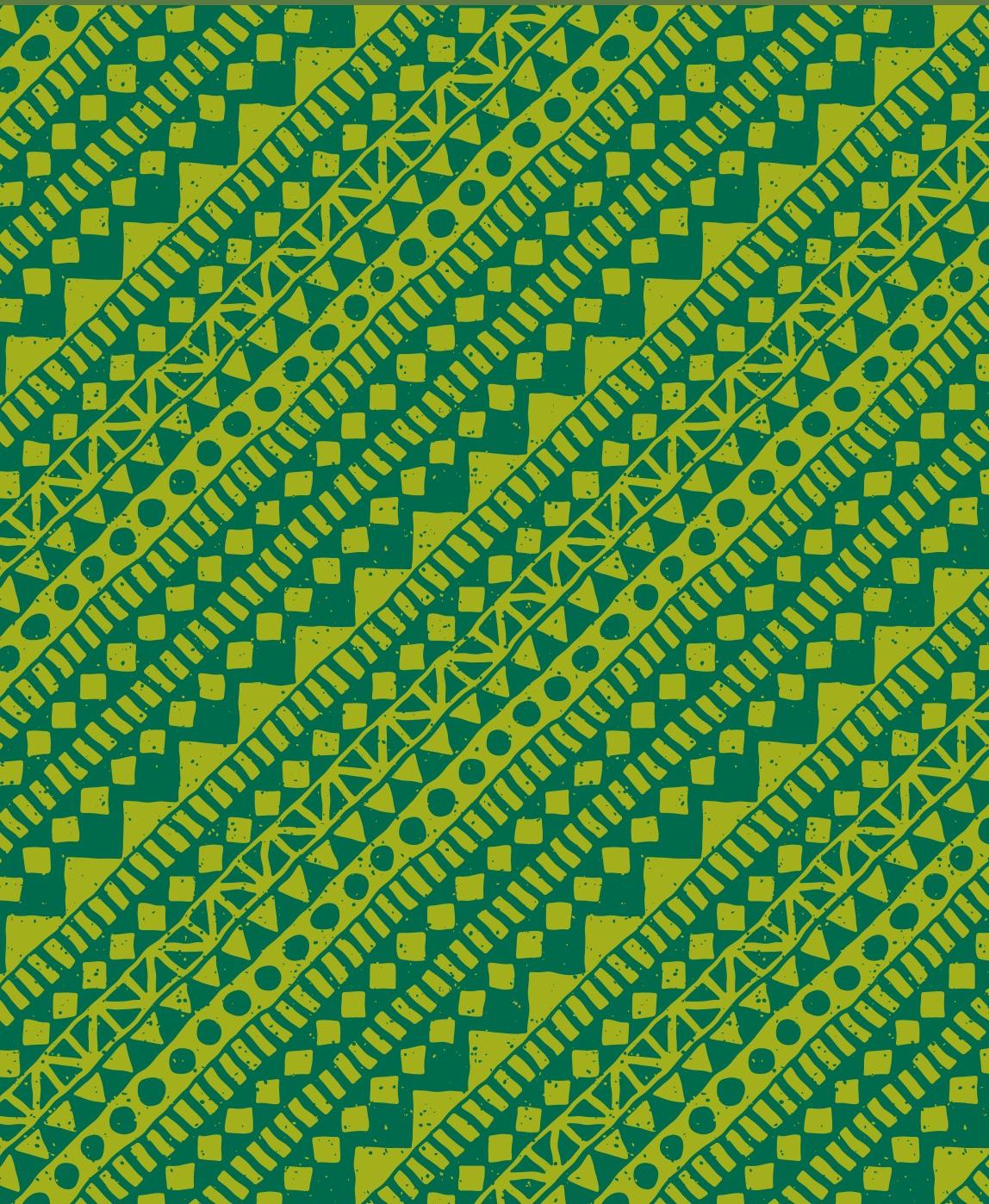


# A Man and a Feline in Mochica Art

Elizabeth P. Benson

DUMBARTON OAKS STUDIES IN PRE-COLUMBIAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY | 14





STUDIES IN PRE-COLUMBIAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY NUMBER FOURTEEN

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IN MOCHICA ART

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Dumbarton Oaks    Trustees for Harvard University    Washington, D.C. 1974

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Library of Congress catalog number 74-18650

ISBN 978-0-88402-058-5

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the interest and cooperation of G. H. S. Bushnell, Nathan Cummings, Dieter Eisleb, Peter T. Furst, Julie Jones, Otto Klein S., Alan Sawyer, Anne-Louise Schaffer, Allen Wardwell, S. Henry Wassén, and Raymond Wielgus.

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Fig. 1 Mochica turquoise carving with pyrite inlay. Dumbarton Oaks Collections, Washington.



Fig. 2 Other side of the turquoise carving. Dumbarton Oaks Collections, Washington.

# A Man and a Feline in Mochica Art

## I

THIS PAPER had its genesis in the attempt to make a brief catalog description of a Mochica piece (Figs. 1, 2, and 3) in the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Columbian Collection. The object is a small turquoise carving, 4 centimeters high by 3.4 centimeters wide by 5.9 centimeters in depth, with pyrite inlay. The carving represents an animal, most certainly a feline, crouching behind a disproportionately small human being. The animal's mouth is open, and its muzzle rests on the man's head, with the forepaws flanking the head. The animal is more realistically rendered than the man, whose head is approximately of equal length with the rest of his body. He wears a hat—a sort of toque with side flaps—but the rest of his clothing, if any, is unclear. There is a rope around his shoulders which appears to tie a bundle on his back. His hands are together in front.

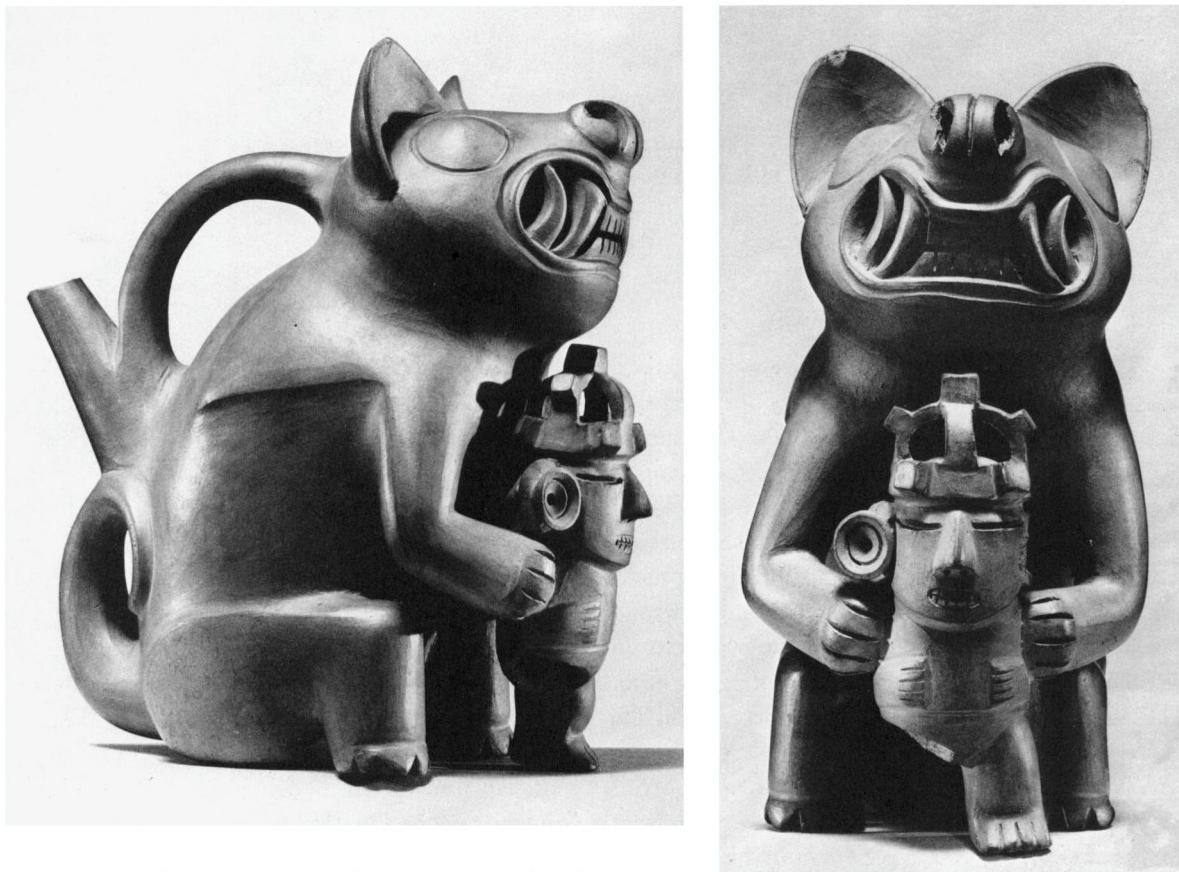
The problem, of course, lies not in the physical description of this piece, but in its meaning or meanings. The Mochica have left, on painted and modeled pots, more vivid pictures of their world than any other Pre-Columbian people, perhaps more various and telling pictures than any other ancient people. There are representations of their flora and fauna and portraits of their chieftains and warriors, their diseased and disfigured. These are often rendered with such extraordinary realism that one knows exactly what sort of bird or squash or deer or disease is represented. Equally often, however, the motifs are blended in what is to us fantasy: beans have human faces and legs, weapons are anthropomorphized, and warriors have wings and hawk beaks. In the attempt to sort out the realities and relationships of the

Mochica world, one can neither take the literal for granted, nor dismiss as fantasy the extraordinary combinations of motifs, for the Mochica view of reality was not that of modern man, and, because they were preliterate people, a high degree of symbolism was involved in their representations.

Who is the man in this turquoise piece, and what is the significance of the feline? What is the relationship between feline and man? Is the feline a predator attacking the man; is it a protector standing behind him; or is there another explanation along the continuum between these two extremes? Does the object represent a real event, a ceremony, a drug-induced hallucination, or a mythical or supernatural situation? Or is it a combination of motifs "readable" only to the initiated?



Fig. 3 Front of the turquoise carving. Dumbarton Oaks Collections, Washington.



Figs. 4 and 5 Gallinazo pot. Virú Valley. Formerly in the collection of James A. Ford. Photos courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

In Pre-Columbian art and in contemporary native Latin-American myth, various large felines are common, the most important of which is the jaguar. The jaguar is the largest cat in the New World; it can stand at least as tall as a large man and may weigh up to 300 pounds. It is a powerful predator, carnivorous, nocturnal, and associated with waterways in the rain forest. A vast ethnographic lore concerns the jaguar in direct relationship with a human being. There is the concept of the "alter ego," a human being's double in the animal world, this animal double being most commonly a jaguar. There is the belief that a shaman or priest can change himself into a jaguar, or the idea that a shaman who has been wounded by a

jaguar and recovers acquires special powers. The ethnographic literature also describes circumstances in which jaguars of awe-inspiring size appear in narcotic-induced dreams; the jaguar may be seen as a dead ancestor or as a shaman who has assumed the form of a jaguar. All these beliefs probably center around the notion of groups of people—clans, tribes, nations—who identify with the jaguar's prowess as a hunter and power as a spirit, and consider themselves "the jaguar's people." The best summary of this subject has been made by Peter Furst (1968).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This motif also appears elsewhere around the Pacific Basin. See *Early Chinese Art and the Pacific Basin* 1968: 65–81.



Fig. 6 Recuay pot. Photo by J. Oster, courtesy of the Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

The theme of a feline (often of disproportionately large size) and a human figure occurs with some frequency on a number of artifacts from various periods and regions in Peru,<sup>2</sup> but principally in pottery from the Mochica civilization. As far as I know, the motif does not exist in Chavín art. An early representation is seen on a Gallinazo pot (Figs. 4 and 5), found in the Virú Valley, which shows a very large feline with a very small man. The feline canines—interlocked, very stylized and prominent—identify the animal as a feline, as does the heavy, curled tail.

<sup>2</sup> The motif also exists at San Agustín, Colombia, but that facet of the problem will not be considered here. See Reichel-Dolmatoff 1972.

The stance of both figures is more hieratic and symmetrical than that seen in the turquoise piece, but the basic ingredients of the posture are essentially the same: the feline is seated, has its head above that of the man, and its paws at the man's shoulders; the man's hands are in front of him, and both figures face straight ahead. The man in the Virú piece wears only a loincloth on his body, but, in contrast, wears on his head a curious, crownlike headdress and one of a pair of earspools (the other has been broken off). The earspool appears to be of the standard Peruvian type with a shaft that went through a hole in the earlobe. The open mouth of the man, showing prominent teeth, and the closed, slit eyes suggest that he

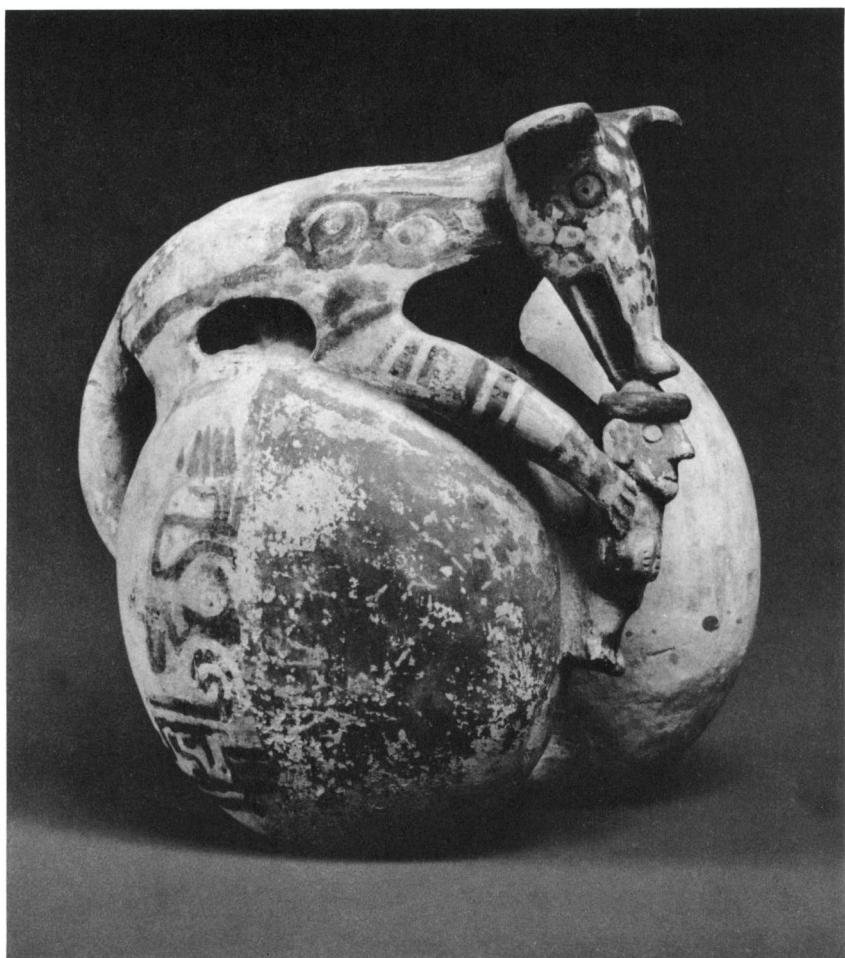


Fig. 7 Recuay pot. Photo courtesy of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin.



Fig. 8 Vicús stone finial. Formerly, collection of Domingo Seminario, Piura.  
Photo courtesy of Alan Sawyer.

may be blind or grimacing in agony or moribund or even dead (this is a common way of representing the dead in Mexican art, but it is not common in Peru), or it may be that he is in some trancelike state. The enormous size of the feline suggests something supernatural, and the very formal composition perhaps indicates a symbolic meaning. Nonetheless, there are no clear answers here to the meaning of the turquoise piece.

In the Recuay culture we find versions of the same theme. One pot (Fig. 6) depicts a large, patterned animal, whose upholstery-material spots suggest a very stylized jaguar, holding at each shoulder an elaborately dressed man, again shown wearing a headdress and prominent circular ear ornaments. The relative size of the two figures is fairly normal. They stand at right angles to each other, but the frontal character of each figure is maintained. Another, cruder Recuay piece, a double vessel (Fig. 7), has an animal—with similar stylized patterning, but no other particular signs of being a feline—on top of one section, holding by the shoulders a very small human figure. The animal's open mouth rests on the man's doughnut-shaped headdress. Again, the man is wearing earspools and has his hands placed at waist height in front of him. Again, both figures are frontal and the composition symmetrical. Both of the Recuay human beings have wide-open eyes and appear to be alive. The Recuay style, however, is not realistic enough to yield any great insights.

A Vicús stone finial, formerly in the collection of Domingo Seminario (Fig. 8),<sup>3</sup> shows a colossal feline behind a seated man, the feline's chin resting on the man's head. The forepaw visible in the photograph rests at the side of the man's head and the hind foot on the man's shoulder. (I assume that this position is repeated on the other side.) The man appears to have hands clasped in front of him and ears covered with flaps.

The earliest Mochica pottery version of this motif

I have found is a Mochica I pot in the Museum of the American Indian (Figs. 9 and 10), in which the stance of both figures is again frontal and symmetrical. A standing, snarling, polka-dotted feline has a paw on either side of a human head which rests on two ankles and feet. The human head has closed eyes and appears to be dead. This may be a trophy head (a head ritually severed as an offering, most likely to a deity). I had at first thought that the feet were added simply as a device to hold the head up, but there are pots in the shape of head effigies which rest on feet like this when it would have been much easier for the potter to have put the head on a simple base. This may be a trophy head on trophy feet! The idea of the head as a seat of human power is behind the Peruvian decapitation and trophy-head cult, but feet also seem to have had some special significance for the Mochica. There are effigy pots representing feet; a foot and a leg were often added to painted representations of the fish or shark monster; and feet and lower legs are also shown in scenes which relate to human sacrifice by beheading and amputation (Kutscher 1954: Pl. 25B).

Later Mochica trophy heads tend to have eyes open rather than closed, so the head and feet here might possibly be read, not as a form of trophy head, but as an abridged version of a human body. They might also represent a shaman in a closed-eyed trance, in which perhaps only his head and feet feel real to him. In any case, the piece serves to point up something that is generally indicated in all the other versions of this motif: it is the head that the feline always focuses on—his paws and head are always somewhere near the man's head. This may well relate to the fact that the jaguar attacks the head of his prey and apparently will attack only if it can see the head. Both jaguars and pumas generally kill large game by breaking the neck (Perry 1970: 29). This hunting habit may reinforce the significance of the Mochica head cult. Jaguars and pumas rear up on their hind legs before pouncing on their prey. Thus the pose of the feline in all these representations approximates the attack position. (In some of the representations, the cat is sitting rather than crouching or rearing, but this is possibly

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Alan Sawyer for bringing this piece to my attention.



Figs. 9 and 10 Mochica pot. Photos courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York.

an artistic convention to render the pose compact enough for the sculptural quality of the material.) Not only does the feline focus on the human head in these examples, but the human head tends to be large in proportion to its body. In the Museum of the American Indian piece, the proportion of the head to the "body" recalls the relative size of the head and

body of the human figure in the turquoise piece, where the head is emphasized and the body almost dismissed. The head of the jaguar and the head of the man are approximately the same size, but the total effect is that of a very large feline and a very small human being. The face painting of the man is unusual (early Mochica face painting, however, is gen-



Fig. 11 Mochica pot. Photo courtesy of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge.

erally more various and less conventionalized than that of later Mochica art). The man wears no ear ornaments—in fact, his ears do not show—and no headdress, and, of course, no clothing. The feline here has been somewhat anthropomorphized. It stands in a manner suggestive of human stance; its forepaws

seem handlike; and its hind paws are represented in a fashion very like the human feet.

In all of the examples so far, the poses of both human and feline are symmetrical, formal, and heraldic, with the disproportionately large cat looking out over the man's head, and its paws evenly placed

at the man's shoulders or head, which is large in comparison with his body.

A group of later Mochica pots has closely related but somewhat differing arrangements. A pot in the Cambridge University Museum (Fig. 11) shows a seated human figure with a feline at his right side. The symmetry of the earlier pots has been relaxed, and the piece is much more realistically rendered. The man sits cross-legged with his head to one side as he looks slightly upward, while the cat looks out over the man's shoulder, snarling at the world. Even here, though, some elements of the earlier formula remain: the man's hands are clasped at waist height in front of him, the feline has a paw symmetrically placed on each of the man's shoulders, and the cat is behind the man. The feline is painted with a pattern of short, straight lines—probably a shorthand statement for hair—and is most likely a puma. The head of the feline is slightly larger than that of the man, and their heights are comparable when both are seated; there is thus a realistic size relationship. The man's head is slightly oversized in relation to his body, but it still maintains fairly naturalistic proportions.

The man wears neither ear ornaments nor headress. He has the hairdress associated with prisoners of war, a sort of soup-bowl haircut with a tuft over the center brow. The garment he wears seems to be a simple sleeved shirt or shift with painted designs. The cuffs have a variation of the swirl, a common and important Mochica motif associated with the sea, and perhaps having other meanings as well. This swirl pattern appears again at the neck. The stepped design—another important motif—is barely visible at the bottom of the garment. There is also a diagonal band across the chest, with a motif that may indicate rattles, snails, or possibly jugs. It is possible that these designs may not be on a garment, but may indicate body painting or ceremonial binding instead. Such designs are sometimes seen as face painting or tattooing on objects of pottery and metal. In fact, there is a painted design on this man's chin.

The man appears to be blind in one eye—one eye is closed while the other is wide open. The closed eye

is rather like the slit eye of the Gallinazo and Mochica I pieces (Figs. 4, 5, 9, and 10). There are a number of depictions of blind people in Mochica art; blindness seems to have had mystical significance. Even the deity is depicted at times as blind in one eye (Wassermann-San Blas 1938: Fig. 534). The eyes and mouth on the Cambridge pot may indicate facial paralysis (see Matos Moctezuma 1970), another ailment that was represented with respect in Mochica art, although the mouth is probably not sufficiently distorted to support this interpretation. The grimace, with teeth prominently displayed, suggests the possibility that this is the human emulation of the feline's snarl. On the Cambridge pot the painting of the eyebrows is particularly interesting. The open eye has a brow like that painted on a doll—it looks more like lashes than a brow. The brow over the closed eye is drawn in a plain arc. Also notable are the man's cauliflower ears. They are quite large and stand away from the head.

Although the feline is menacing, it is not clear whether it is threatening the man or someone facing it and the man. The cat here may very well be a protective figure. It looks as if it might be saying, "Don't touch this man—he's mine!" But for what purpose? The man's face indicates some state of anguish or supplication. His hands are clasped in a sort of prayer pose.

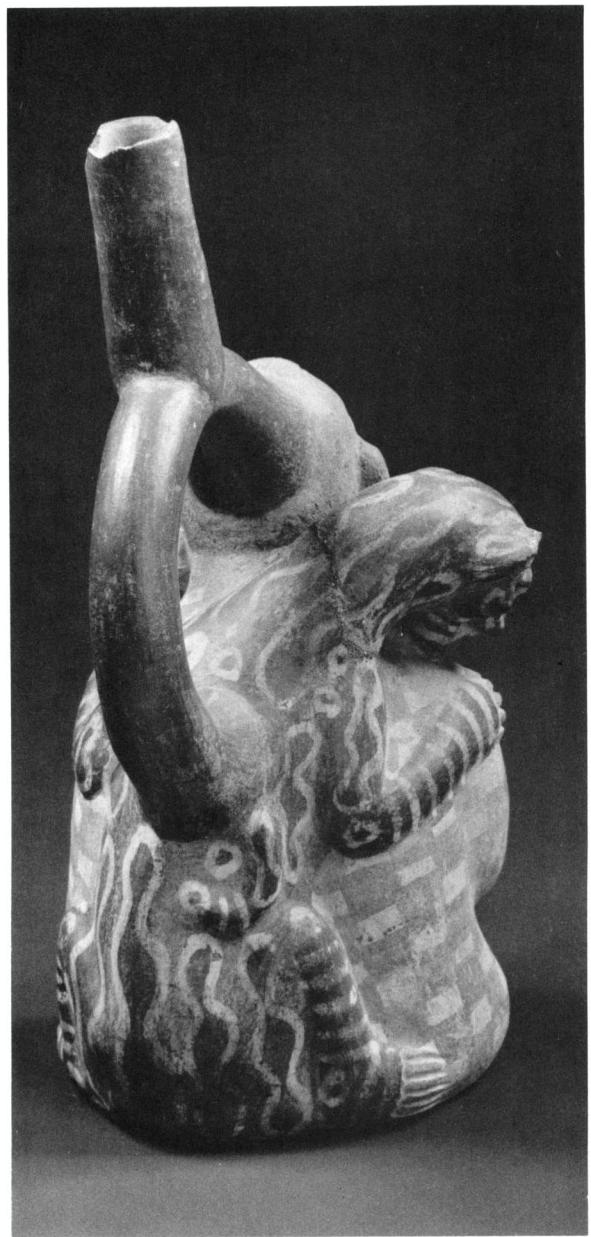
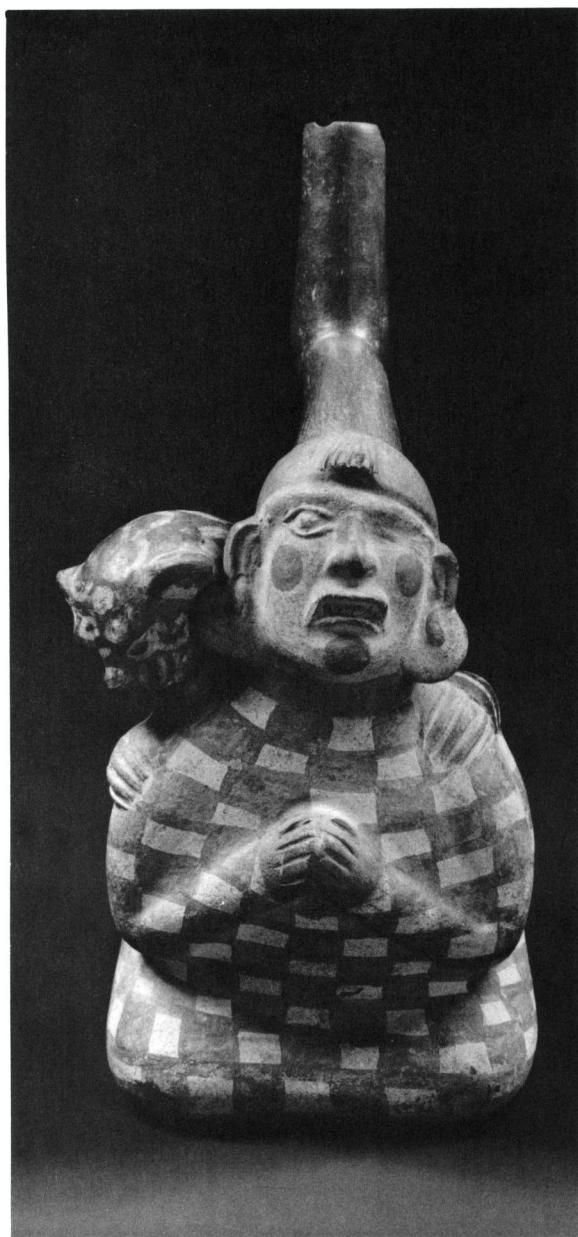
A figure similar to this was published in the Wassermann-San Blas Collection and is now in the private collection of Nathan Cummings (Fig. 12). The human figure has the same tufted hairdress, is blind in one eye, and has a curious jack-o'-lantern mouth with teeth showing. The right ear, standing somewhat away from the head, has a hole in it, as if an ornament were intended to be attached; the left ear is only roughly rendered and does not appear to have this hole. The figure has hands clasped in front of his chest, and his head leans slightly to the left, away from the feline that leans over his right shoulder, placing a paw on each of his shoulders. The feline here is much smaller in relation to the man than the Cambridge feline, its head being only about half the



Fig. 12 Mochica pot. Collection of Nathan Cummings, New York. After Wassermann-San Blas 1938: Fig. 463.

size of the man's. The decoration of the human figure suggests body painting rather than a garment, although the checkerboard bib may be of cloth. Certainly the lower part of the body is unclothed; the phallus

and pubic hair are plainly visible. (This was probably also true of the Cambridge pot, but the condition in this area is poor, making definite determination impossible.) There are curious stripes on the legs of the



Figs. 13 and 14 Mochica pot. Photos courtesy of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin.

man, and various geometric motifs and animal figures on his arm and body.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Cummings tells me that this vase has been repainted, which may account for certain eccentricities in the designs. Parts of it appear to have been restored.

The Museo Larco Herrera in Lima has another version of this theme. The feline looks out over the shoulder of the man, who is seated crosslegged with hands in prayer pose and head to one side. He is blind in one eye and has “Maltese-cross” face painting. The

surface of the figure is eroded, but there are traces of paint around the neck, indicating a design similar to that on the neck of the Cambridge figure, with traces of a checkerboard design below it. Again, the phallus is prominent.

A Mochica IV pot in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (Figs. 13 and 14; Schmidt 1929: Pl. 152, left), represents a man, apparently kneeling. Again, his hands are clasped in front and his head,

having the same sort of soup-bowl haircut with a tuft above the brow, is slightly upturned. As on the Cambridge and Cummings pots, the man is blind in one eye. His face is painted with a circle on each cheek and one on the chin. He wears an unusual type of ear ornament and a garment with a checkerboard pattern which covers his arms to the wrists—it does not seem to have sleeves but only slits for the hands to come through. (Mochica artists were quite capable



Fig. 15 Mochia pot. Photo courtesy of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge.

of depicting sleeves when they wanted to.) The garment is tight around the man's neck. Again, this man has prominent teeth and no headdress. Again, he seems to be unhappy about his situation; he does not project a sense of security about the protectiveness of the feline who crouches to his right. Again, there is a possessive paw placed on each of the man's shoulders, but the feline appears to be gnawing on one of the shoulders. The feline here is small and is possibly an ocelot or a very young jaguar.

An effigy pot in the Peabody Museum at Harvard (Fig. 15) shows a feline seated behind and to the right of a man. The man is also seated and has a tilted, upturned head with the same sort of hairdress and prominent ears and teeth as on the two previous illustrated pots. Both creatures are approximately the same size. The feline, who is nibbling on the man's shoulder, is apparently a puma. It has a solid dark coat with a white-freckled muzzle and underbelly. The man is completely nude except for a rope around his neck. He has Maltese-cross face painting, and both eyes are open and tilted to the heavens. Unlike the previous figures, though, his hands are tied behind his back.

All five of these later Mochica modeled pots suggest some extraordinary state of being. It can be read most simply as the agony, pain, and fear of being attacked by a fierce feline. It might also indicate, however, a shaman's state of exhilaration or intoxication while hallucinating the feline or undergoing initiatory wounding.

In the Art Institute of Chicago, there is a variation of this theme on a Mochica IV painted pot (Figs. 16 and 17), the variation perhaps being to some extent dictated by the technique. There is a similar scene on either side of the pot. In both scenes the jaguar and the man sit facing each other instead of the jaguar's being behind the man. The jaguar's outstretched claws reach toward the man's neck. The man sits with head tilted back, teeth prominent, eye closed. (This may well be intended as another figure blind in one eye; it was a convention of Mochica pot painters to show figures in profile.) Here the hairdress con-

sists of a pony-tail in back rather than the frontal tuft seen on the modeled figures. This is probably a normal hairdress, but would rarely be seen because most figures wear some sort of headgear.

The painted figures are seated in a landscape with cacti and clouds of sand around them. On one side of the pot, the man, seated crosslegged, has his arms extended in front (Fig. 16). They may be bound together in a sort of handcuff, or the dark bands at the wrists may be bracelets or wrist-guards (such do exist). In any case, he is again in prayer pose. He wears what looks like a primitive straitjacket, the designs of which are also worn by Mochica warriors. The panel to the left probably has small disks attached; what may be metal plaques around the waist are common on warriors' garments. This uncommon side view of a warrior's "armor" shows the back ties of the garment. This is the first example seen in this paper of a figure dressed in at least the partial garb of a warrior. He does not wear the warrior's helmet, however.

The ear of this figure is particularly notable. Three of the four modeled Mochica IV pieces have distended ears with no ear ornaments. The ear here—which is drawn in a rather stylized way—is also without an ornament. The Cummings piece has a hole in the lobe which might be construed as a hole for an ear ornament to be attached to the pot. The indication on the painted pot, however, is that this is a representation of a man who would normally be wearing ear ornaments, but who is not wearing them on this occasion. I think that this is also the explanation for the prominent ears on the modeled pots: they were enlarged and pulled forward by the habitual use of ear ornaments which the figures are no longer wearing. All of these men were important enough to have worn large and impressive ear ornaments.

A scene similar to the one just discussed is painted on the other side of the pot (Fig. 17). Here the jaguar's forelegs go straight out so that only the claws of the uppermost paw threaten the neck of the man, who again sits with head tilted, eye closed, teeth

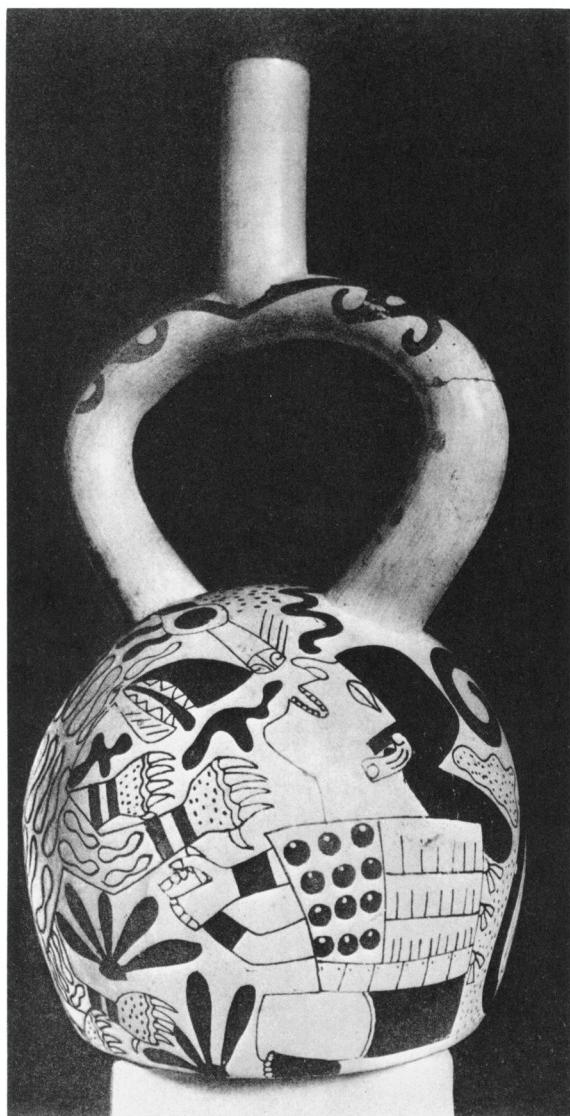


Fig. 16 Mochica pot. Art Institute of Chicago. After Lehmann and Doering 1924: Pl. 85.

Fig. 17 Mochica pot. Photo courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

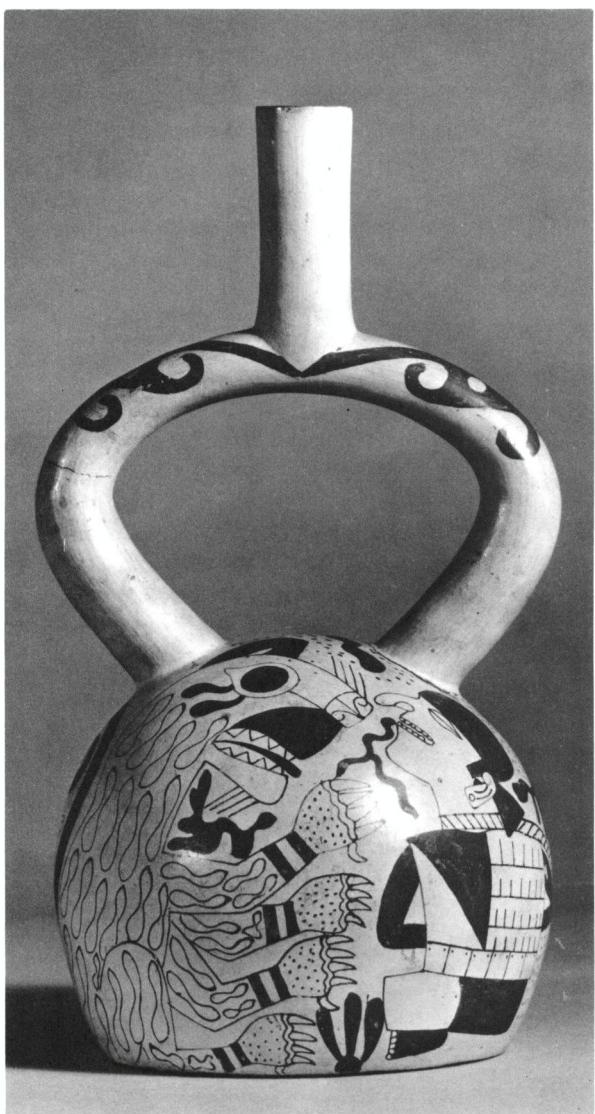




Fig. 18 Mochica wooden ceremonial staff or digging stick. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wielgus. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 19 Mochica pot. Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima.  
Photo by the author.

bared, and ear unornamented. The man has a rope around his neck; his hands seem to be tied behind his back; and, again, his shirt is that of a warrior, suggesting that perhaps he is a prisoner-of-war stripped of his headdress and weapons. His teeth are clenched, and blood seems to be issuing from his mouth. This man is actually being attacked by the jaguar and suffering wounds.

Although in the modeled pots the human beings look pained or moribund and the felines aggressive,

it is still possible that some extraordinary experience is being represented. This painted pot, however, suggests more strongly an attack by the large cat and the wounding of the man.

A Mochica wooden ceremonial staff or digging stick (Fig. 18) shows a different formal arrangement of this motif. A very large jaguar, with an open mouth and holes for inlay, grabs with both fore-paws the chest of a man who lies in an agonized supine position. The rear feet of the jaguar rest on the

man's knees. Certainly nothing here indicates the protective quality of the feline. We are reminded that a jaguar, after sucking blood from its victim, will eat its flesh from the neck and breast. The wooden piece seems to express this interest of the feline in the man's chest. (It may also express sacrifice by ripping the heart from the chest.) We have now gone beyond the concepts of the alter ego or hallucination, and, I believe, even beyond the idea of a man's being wounded by a jaguar and acquiring

special powers upon recovery. It is hard to believe that this man will recover from the feline attack. The man's mouth is open; the eyes are empty sockets. He appears to be not only already dead, but already skeletal. He seems to be undeniably the victim of the jaguar.

A pot in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Lima (Fig. 19), rendered in a crude and decadent Mochica style, shows a version of the theme similar to the Cambridge and Cummings pots. A man kneels



Fig. 20 Pot from Cajamarquilla. After d'Harcourt 1924: Pl. 31.

in prayer pose, leaning away from a feline who rests on his right shoulder. The man is dressed in a garment similar to that of the Cambridge pot, with step-scroll designs around the bottom of the kilt and a diagonal pattern across the chest. But the spirit of the motif as seen in the Mochica IV pots has already changed. The man has both eyes open; his mouth appears to be open, but the teeth are not shown. The hairdress is different, although his visible ear is prominent and unornamented. His sexual organs are covered. The feline no longer grasps the man, nor seems to threaten him. Rather, it holds its right paw rather pensively at its own mouth, looking out with an almost benign expression. The motif shows a weakening that led Valcarcel (1937: 3) to describe the pot as follows [author's translation]:

... in this vase the *tigriollo* is raised on the shoulders by a man, like something without much importance. The feline lacks dreadfulness, is inoffensive and almost friendly. . . . This treats of a scene from ordinary life, purely anecdotal, without transcendence or special significance.

One would not have written this description for the wooden representation. This pot seems to have been copied from an earlier pot by someone who did not understand its significance.

A curious Mochica pot, published by Klein (1967: Cover and Fig. 21), shows a man with closed eyes and lopsided face, wearing the kind of ear ornaments that are often shown on ceremonial coca-chewers. A small feline behind him at his right side stretches a paw across to the man's neck, touching his chin. Although the position of the man and the feline is reminiscent of the theme treated in this paper and may well be related to it, I believe that this pot belongs essentially to another complex that shows a feline and a tuber with a human face, a snake, a skull, etc. (Tello 1938: Pls. 210-12).

The theme dealt with in this paper appears occasionally in other times and places in the Andes. A pot from Cajamarquilla (Fig. 20), published by d'Harcourt (1924: Pl. 31) as being in his collection, shows an enormous seated feline with stylized square spots holding the body of a small, nude, sexless figure



Fig. 21 Huari-Tiahuanaco double vessel. Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima. Photo by the author.

with a large hole in its chest. The figure is lying at the feline's feet, and the feline is not in an attacking position, but has one forepaw on the human's head and the other on the wound. The motif here seems very closely related to that of the wooden Mochica piece.

There is also a South Coast Huari-Tiahuanaco double vessel in the Museo Nacional de Antropología (Fig. 21), one part of which is a painted kero and the other an effigy seated jaguar. The latter is painted with trefoil pelage markings and holds in its forepaws the head of a man. This head has open, white-painted eyes and wears a close-fitting dark cap (this kind of cap appears also on certain Mochica figures). There is no indication of a body; this appears to be a trophy head. This piece seems to relate to the North Coast tradition and to the Museum of the American Indian pot in particular: again, there is an oversized jaguar in a very symmetrical pose, fangs bared, its paws on the man's head.

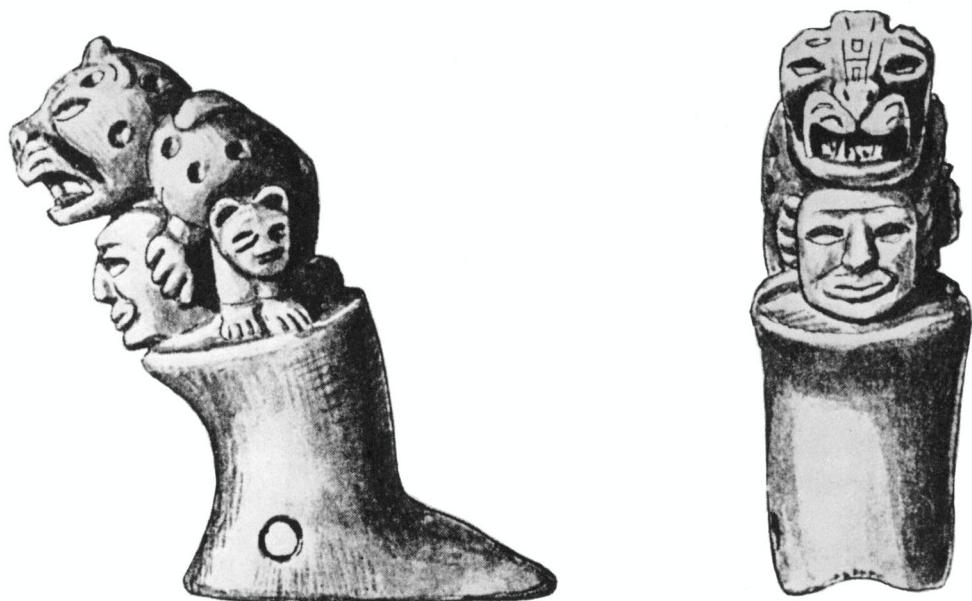


Fig. 22 Bone Huari-Tiahuanaco spear-thrower. After Nordenskiöld 1931: Fig. 8.

Another Huari-Tiahuanaco vessel was illustrated in a recent sales catalog of Sotheby Parke Bernet (1972: No. 123). It consists of a large feline and a small human being combined into a single pot form. The open-mouthed feline has a paw—as on some of the earlier pieces, it resembles a hand—which seems to tickle the chin of the human, which here has no apparent body, only an extended arm.

Part of a bone spearthrower from Tiahuanaco (Fig. 22), published by Nordenskiöld (1931: Fig. 8), shows a large feline grasping a masklike human head.

What is curious about this version of the motif is the head and paws of a feline cub visible in the side view of the object.

An Inca wooden *paccha* in the British Museum (Fig. 23) was used for the ceremonial drinking of chicha, which was first poured into the bowl and then allowed to trickle through the feline body and out through the mouth of the man. The large snarling feline stands on four feet behind the rather small man who sits with legs extended. The man is nude and unornamented—at least his dress is not indicated.



Fig. 23 Inca wooden *paccha*. Photo courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum, London.



Although it is outside the limits of the region chosen for this paper, I would like to mention a stone piece from the Río Trombetas, Amazon Basin, Brazil (Fig. 24), now in the Göteborg Ethnographic Museum, because it is remarkably like the Gallinazo piece (Figs. 4 and 5). The oversized feline is rampant behind the man, its head on the man's head and its paws at either side of the man's head. The man is grimacing. There is a cavity in the back of the feline, which Wassén (1967: 114) suggests might have been intended as the storage place for some form of psychotomimetic powder used in ceremonial snuffing.

Fig. 24 Stone snuff container from Sucurujú, Río Trombetas, Brazil. Göteborg Ethnographic Museum, Göteborg. Photo courtesy of S. Henry Wassén.

## II

AN ANTHROPOMORPHIC DEITY with feline canines and snakes emerging from its belt appears in Chavín art, and some descendant of this deity (if it was not assumed to be the same deity who had earlier been worshiped in the mountains) was taken over or inherited by other Peruvian peoples, including the Mochica on the North Coast. The Mochica deity had—in addition to the feline canines and the snake belt—round, wide-open eyes, snakehead earrings, and, most commonly, a headdress with a jaguar head at the front. I am assuming a single deity, although this was undoubtedly a dual, if not a tripartite, deity—that is, there was god-the-father and god-the-son, if not god-the-father and twin sons. God-the-father was probably a creator god, the god of the sky, the sun, and the mountains. The Mochica presumably went into the mountains, where this deity dwelt, to make sacrifices. A number of pots show two victims who were apparently pushed—or made to jump—from a mountain peak (e.g., see Kutscher 1954: Pl. 78). These sacrifices undoubtedly propitiated the mountain deity, who must also have been the deity of fresh water, of the rivers that come down from the mountains to make agriculture possible in the coastal desert. God-the-son was an active god, most frequently depicted fighting the battles of the coastal people; he was the super-Mochica who fished or fought a shark-monster or a crab-monster. He probably came down from the mountains and was another aspect of the supreme creator god. God-the-son is shown in another type of sacrifice scene in which two victims appear to be drowning in the sea, one on the top of a breaking wave and the other sprawled on the lowest of three steps below the wave (Benson 1972: Pls. 2-11, 2-12).

There is usually a pair of victims in the sacrifice scenes. The Mochica tended to think in terms of pairs or twins. Sometimes there is a scene painted all around a pot, but more commonly there is a pair of scenes, one on either side. The Chicago pot (Figs. 16 and 17), with its two painted scenes, is an example of

this. Notable here is the fact that one of the victims on the Chicago pot is in prayer pose, while the other has his hands tied behind his back. In most of the examples of this theme in modeled Mochica pottery, the hands are in prayer pose; the Peabody pot (Fig. 15), is unusual in depicting the hands tied behind. Mochica pots were sometimes—if not always—made in pairs, and it may well be that for each pot with hands in prayer pose there was a pot with hands tied behind.

Since the majority of figures in this study are depicted in the prayer pose, it seems worthwhile to note where and when this gesture occurs. The hands are usually shown clasped or overlapping, held away from the body, and at a height from just above the waist to face level. In our culture this would most commonly indicate either prayer or applause. The Mochica figure making this gesture usually has an upturned head. The deity himself is thus depicted on several pots where the scenes have to do with ritual coca-taking (Kutscher 1950a: Fig. 26 and Pl. 69, left). An anthropomorphic lizard, who frequently appears with the deity, is often pictured facing the deity and making this gesture, as if it were applauding him (*ibid.*: Fig. 64). Several anthropomorphic owls, or men with owl masks, are shown in prayer pose (Wassermann-San Blas 1938: Fig. 259). (Owl demons, like the lizard, are associated with the deity.) An anthropomorphic deer, seated and with a rope around its neck, is also depicted in this pose (Larco Hoyle 1966: Pl. 43). Again the gesture is found on modeled pots which represent an anthropomorphized phallus (Larco Hoyle 1965: 54). It is also a common pose of “death-priests” (Benson n.d.a; e.g., see Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Köln, 1959: Pl. 25). The gesture always appears to be one of veneration or respectful greeting, and is often directed toward—or has some relationship to—the deity. For the most part, it is made by creatures who themselves have some supernatural power.

Four of the late Mochica examples of the man-feline theme seem to have mostly body painting in varied designs rather than garments (Figs. 11, 12, 19, and the unillustrated Larco pot). Of the remaining

modeled pots, the Peabody one (Fig. 15) has no clothing at all, and the Berlin one (Figs. 13 and 14) has a garment with a checkerboard design, a motif that also appears, along with other patterns, on the Cummings and Larco pots. A checkerboard garment is frequently shown on people involved in a ritual in which coca leaves are chewed with lime (Kutscher 1950a: Fig. 26). The pattern also sometimes appears on shirts held by people wearing disk ear ornaments and caps like that depicted on the trophy head in Figure 21. The cap and disk ear ornament are commonly worn by people holding coca-taking equipment (Sawyer 1966: Fig. 69), and most of the people holding shirts have a coca pouch at the shoulder. Coca bags, or *chuspas*, frequently have a checkerboard design also (Kutscher 1950a: Pl. 34). Certain other seated or kneeling figures wear a checkerboard garment similar to that on the Berlin pot (Sawyer 1966: Fig. 23). Sometimes the feet protrude below it, but more often it seems to be a sort of bag enclosing the feet. The garment rarely has sleeves, and sometimes hands and arms do not show at all. In some cases the wearer looks like a bundle. One wonders if it is possible that the wearer of the checkerboard garment was intended to look like a *chuspa*, or if he was at least intended to be dressed in the same kind of "garment" that the coca leaves are kept in. The effigy figures shown wearing this garment are occasionally depicted in prayer pose (Kroeber 1925: Pl. 54g), and wearing circular face painting (Sawyer 1966: Fig. 23), like the Berlin figure. Maltese-cross facial designs, like that on the Peabody pot, are sometimes associated with the checkerboard garment (Kutscher 1950a: Fig. 26) and frequently with coca-chewing (Larco Hoyle 1966: Pl. 22).

A rectangle quartered to form a slightly lopsided pinwheel or Maltese cross appears frequently on warriors' gear, especially on shirts, but also on helmets and shields. It is often associated with an angular S. In one instance it is shown on the shirt of a conquered warrior being held by the hair by another warrior with a shirt and helmet of swirl design (Ubbelohde-Doering 1954: Pl. 175). The man in the

Peabody pot, with his Maltese-cross face painting and his resemblance to captured warriors in various painted scenes (see Kutscher 1954: Pl. 23), may represent a prisoner-of-war. Similarly, body painting, which has some relationship to that on the four man-feline pots mentioned above, appears on a defeated warrior in another painted scene (Kutscher 1950a: Fig. 23), suggesting that the Cambridge, Cummings, Museo Nacional, and Larco pots may also have been prisoners-of-war.

The Chicago figures are clearly warriors, without the symbolic dress or paint shown on other figures mentioned here. A pot in the Museo Larco Herrera (Larco Hoyle 1938–39, II: Fig. 199) shows two warriors fully clad, facing two large jaguars. This is the only composition of this kind that I know of, and at first I rejected it as not being part of this sequence. But now I believe that it is closely related and reinforces the notion that some, if not all, of the jaguar's victims were warriors.

The Mochica were a warlike people who extended their territory by conquest, seeking new valleys to irrigate and plant. They captured prisoners-of-war, stripped them of clothing and paraphernalia, and led them triumphantly back by ropes around the neck, like that on the man in Figure 15. A *florero* in the Berlin Museum shows just such a scene (Schmidt 1929: Pl. 201). Prisoners were then presented by the commanding general to the chieftain and/or chief priest, who wore, in part, the costume of the feline god (see Kutscher 1954: Pl. 23). The prisoners sat crosslegged, with ropes around their necks, hands in front (but not clasped), and faces painted. Behind them their captured clothing and weapons indicated their previous occupation. In addition to painted pots, there are also a number of modeled effigy pots representing captured warriors or victims with a rope around the neck, a soup-bowl haircut with a frontal tuft, and ears without ornaments.<sup>5</sup> This latter feature does not necessarily mean that the victorious Mochica deprived their captives of ear ornaments,

<sup>5</sup> There are a number of unpublished examples in the Museo Larco Herrera, Lima.

but that ornaments were probably not worn into battle; there was instead a protective ear disk attached to the Mochica warrior's helmet. Nevertheless, ear ornaments were symbolically important, and their presence or absence in Mochica art is significant. Battle scenes often show the victorious warrior grasping the hair of his defeated, helmetless enemy. Headgear clearly had ritual meaning, and its absence, like that of ear ornaments, is significant. Hair seems to have had both practical importance (i.e., as a handle) and symbolic importance (i.e., the cutting of the hair of prisoners—except for the forelock—had a Samsonian mystique). Trophy heads were often held by the hair; the tufted haircut may have been part of the trophy-head ritual.

Mochica potters must have seen actual large felines, for there are a number of realistic representations. Some are effigy jaguars in the same rampant pose in which such cats are shown with human beings (Larco Hoyle 1965: 77). There are also recumbent jaguars (Tello 1938: Pls. 178–80) and felines standing on four legs. Many of the Mochica effigy cats are depicted with a rope around their necks, which may mean that they were tied to a stake (although a rope around the neck clearly had symbolic connotations as well as practical ones). A painted pot in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (Kutscher 1954: Pl. 75), depicting a mythical or hallucinated scene—or possibly an earthquake—shows a jaguar held by an anthropomorphized stake in a temple. A large number of effigy pots show a seated man holding a small jaguar; sometimes the man has the prisoner's haircut (Sawyer 1966: Fig. 80) or Maltese-cross face painting.

The Mochica must have made regular trips to and beyond the mountains for trade and ritual purposes. The finest coca, for example, comes from the eastern slopes of the Andes. It is likely that the Mochica, at some special time in the sacred calendar, brought feline cubs down to the coast, where they were kept by the priest for use at other moments in the ritual calendar. Jaguars can survive in a wide range of climate, and do so if there is a need to follow game into, say, higher altitudes or drier regions than their

preferred rain-forest habitat. They would probably have survived a certain length of captivity on the coast. It is therefore possible that the representations of the feline and man may have represented an actual event in Mochica life. The feline would have been identified not only with the fanged deity but with what must have been the sacred land on the far side of the mountains.

There is no clear-cut evidence that prisoners-of-war were sacrificed to a feline. The standard mountain and wave sacrifice scenes do not depict felines. There is, however, a painted pot in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich (Kutscher 1950a: Fig. 62), that suggests this possibility. The scene takes place on two tiers, the upper one of which is probably the sky, inhabited by two deities (what seems to have been a militaristic moon deity had by this time become important in Mochica iconography) and many lesser demons. A two-headed sky monster divides this register from the lower one, where there are two nude figures with hands tied, each faced by an anthropomorphic creature who has one hand on the victim's neck and the other on what is apparently a knife. It would seem clear that the fate of these men is decapitation. One of the executioners is an anthropomorphic jaguar-warrior—a warrior with a jaguar face and tail, and bird feet—and the other a curious hawk-faced figure with a poncho that seems to be made of jaguar skins. Watching the scene, while sitting in a litter, is a naturalistic jaguar which belongs to the moon god in the sky level above.

Several scenes on pots seem to represent the presentation and sacrifice of captured warriors. Kutscher (1950b: Fig. 4) reproduces a painted scene with a priest or chieftain seated in a building on a pyramid with three pumas on the roof. Two nude figures are running up the steps of the pyramid, and approaching it at the base is a procession of three litters, borne by nude men and carrying figures who must be prisoners-of-war despoiled of their helmets and garments and probably of all their clothing. The first litter has on it a step motif, symbol of power or rank; the man in the last litter has a rope around his neck. On the

lowest level of the pot probably representing a later moment in time, are three nude men, possibly those who are shown above in the litters. At each end of the register is a trophy head, perhaps indicating their fate. On the uppermost level is another scene, probably again intended as a different moment in time. Here there are two seated nude prisoners, one of whom is about to be beheaded by two anthropomorphic monsters.

Another painted pot in the Museo Larco Herrera<sup>6</sup> shows a continuous scene which is probably two related scenes. There are two houses with two figures in each house, one of whom wears a jaguar headdress. A procession of nude figures goes past one house toward the other. One man runs before and one behind, and between them are two men carrying a basket litter in which another man rides. Behind the last man is a decapitated head with a rope through the mouth. This scene merges into one with two mountain peaks, on top of one of which is a monster holding weapons. A nude figure has fallen between the two peaks. Another nude figure stands in prayer pose on the other side of the mountain, with an amputated arm above him and an amputated leg behind him. Farther down the hill two other nude figures approach. A similar theme is more simply expressed on a pot in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (Kutscher 1954: Pl. 23), where prisoners are seated on the ground facing a chieftain.

In the first of these three presentation and sacrifice scenes felines were depicted on the temple roof (various symbols are often shown on rooftops), but there were no felines in the other scenes. However, two realistic jaguars and what must be the tail of a third appear between the parts of a related scene or scenes shown on two fragments from a painted pot published by Larco Hoyle (1938–39, II: Lám. xxx). There are no warriors in this scene, but a house with warclubs on the roof is shown on a platform, with

<sup>6</sup> There is no good published reproduction of this piece. Larco Hoyle has published a photograph of a partial view (1966: Pl. 48) and a rather unsatisfactory roll-out drawing (1946: Fig. 20c).

three lizardlike anthropomorphs seated facing it in somewhat the same manner as the prisoners sit on the Berlin pot published by Kutscher (1954: Pl. 23).

The two dominant themes to which the man-feline motif seems to relate in Mochica art are the representations of prisoners-of-war and the depictions of the coca ritual. These two themes are themselves related. A painted scene that shows some relationships to the man-feline subject, as well as to war, is the two-part mountain scene depicting the coca ritual on a pot in the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart (Kutscher 1950a: Fig. 26). In one part, the deity stands under a sky monster and black spots that undoubtedly indicate a night sky. He raises his head and hands (in prayer pose) toward the sky, has a coca bag over his arm, and a lime gourd in front of him. The second half of the scene shows three individuals taking coca, also under a night sky. All three have Maltese-cross face painting, and the central and largest figure wears a loose checkerboard garment; in front of him is a club and shield. This pot and a companion pot (Larco Hoyle 1938–39, II: Lám. xxix) suggest that weapons are part of the coca-chewing ceremony. There is no explicit indication of sacrifice here. This may be some sort of consecration of weapons before battle. On the other hand, these may have been the weapons of a conquered enemy being presented to the god before the sacrifice of their owner.

Another pot relating to the coca ceremony is a modeled one in the Museum of the American Indian (Dockstader 1967: Pl. 118). It represents the deity in prayer pose in the mountains. The deity stands in the center looking upward; there are two secondary figures at the sides. No coca paraphernalia is shown, but the deity wears the sort of ear ornament that is generally associated with coca-chewing, and the scene is very much like a modeled pot in the Museo Nacional, Lima (Tello 1938: Pl. 278), where the deity stands alone in prayer pose with a lime case and a conch shell at his feet. (The conch shell is also associated with the coca ritual.) The two subsidiary figures on the Museum of the American Indian pot

are smaller than the deity—and one is considerably smaller than the other. The larger one wears a checkerboard garment, has Maltese-cross face painting, and the tufted hairdress. He grasps a lime gourd in his left hand; one might guess that there is coca in the pack tied on his back. He is somewhat reminiscent of the checkerboard figure on the painted pot in Stuttgart, except that he has no headdress (the one in Stuttgart is elaborate) and his eyes are closed. He is, however, wearing ear ornaments. If the checkerboard garment signifies the carrier of coca or the celebrant in a coca rite, then what is the association with the feline? For one, the figure on the Berlin pot (Figs. 13 and 14) wears this garment with a feline in association; and, for another, the Dumbarton Oaks turquoise figure (Figs. 1–3) has a pack strapped on his back, which might contain coca. Moreover, on the Museum of the American Indian pot, although the man in the checkerboard shift does not appear to be in any imminent danger, he is paired with a small, nude prisoner figure with a rope around his neck, a figure that has open eyes and looks shrunken and, if not skeletal, virtually dead; it is reminiscent of the figure lying under the attacking jaguar in the wooden piece (Fig. 18).

It is possible that the Mochica IV man-feline pots may represent young men undergoing initiation rites for warriors. In Inca times young nobles preparing to be warriors were put through severe tests. If they came through the ordeal successfully, their ears were pierced by the Inca with a gold pin as “the first and principal token of knighthood. . . .” This was a mark of royal and supreme distinction (Garcilaso de la Vega 1966, I: 372). Molina (1873: 38) adds that they were also given *chuspas*, or coca bags. It is possible that these practices are remnants of an ancient ritual. But there are several arguments against this interpretation for the Mochica scenes. The Inca ears were pierced and the *chuspas* given at a time when the young warriors were also presented with rich garments—which is not true in the Mochica scenes. In addition, the men represented on the Mochica pots have ears that are already distended; in other words,

they have already been wearing ear ornaments. (It is true that one must not read too much realism into Mochica representations. The pierced ear may be read simply as a symbol, not just as the representation of a moment in time or the history of a man.) And finally, there is no reference to a feline or feline symbolism in the Inca accounts.

With regard to these effigies of men and felines, it seems more likely that a prisoner-of-war, a foreign chieftain or general, a man who habitually wore elaborate garments and ear ornaments, was captured by “the jaguar’s children,” in this case the Mochica. The feline represents the spirit or totem of the Mochica, to whom the prisoner is subjected. The prisoner may well have been quite literally presented to a local captive feline, representing not only the power of the Mochica but also the power of their god. Although the modeled pots might still be interpreted figuratively in terms of an initiation, the wooden digging stick seems to make another point. The Mochica would hardly have made an elaborate symbolic object to represent a young man who had failed his initiation; this would seem to be a shameful event to record. The representation of a captured enemy, however, overcome by the power and spirit of the Mochica, *would* be important.

Although the man-feline motif remained visually fairly static throughout a long period of time, its meaning probably did not. As a constantly important motif, it signified a vital relationship between man and feline, which existed throughout indigenous thought in Latin America. But its immediate significance must have been modified by the general beliefs of the times. In the two late pieces, the Inca *paccha* (Fig. 23) and the Río Trombetas snuff container (Fig. 24), this motif is associated with the rituals of chicha and snuff; no concept of human sacrifice seems implied here. In the *paccha* the feline is the medium through which the man receives the ritual chicha. In the Río Trombetas piece the feline is the keeper of the ritual snuff. The Recuay and Virú pots may illustrate a simple alter ego concept: the twin souls of man and animal, or the feline as the

protector of the man. In many examples, particularly the earlier and later ones, the feline tends to be oversized, suggesting a mythical or hallucinated creature. The wide distribution of the theme certainly argues for a mythic basis.

In the Mochica IV pottery, however, the felines tend to be of realistic size and are generally more realistically represented. (It is interesting to note that the turquoise and wooden pieces depict instead a gigantic feline.) The references on these pots to the ritual chewing of coca may relate to the mountain deity. Mortimer, in his study of coca at the beginning of this century (1901: 203), reports that it was customary for Indians leaving the coast for a trip to the mountains to throw coca into the air to propitiate the mountain god. He also relates a then-current belief that, if a dying man can taste coca leaves pressed to his lips, he will go to paradise (*ibid.*: 73); here then is a lingering association of coca with death. Amongst the Mochica there probably existed the belief that

someone who had been wounded by a jaguar and survived the attack could become a priest or warrior with special powers. But that belief does not seem to be the only explanation for what is illustrated in these pots. I think that the feline was indeed the protector of the Mochica, but not of the man represented with the animal—unless, of course, the man survived.

The meaning of these pieces probably varied at different times with different emphases, different rituals, and different versions of the basic myth. No one of these meanings precludes the possibility of others. But I think that part of the meaning during the Mochica IV period may have been related to an actual event in which a prisoner-of-war was presented to a feline acting as a proxy of the god, an event closely tied in with ritual, religion, warfare, and the conquest of new lands—new lands dedicated both to the glory of the god with the feline teeth and to the practical need of irrigable land for a growing population.

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